

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **Jesus - He is risen! - The dynamic change**

During the time when the communists ruled Russia and Christians were being violently persecuted for their faith, believers would greet each other with the statement, "He is risen" and would receive the reply from a fellow believer, "He is risen indeed!" Today, Easter Sunday I can greet you with the same message, "He is risen" and you can reply, "He is risen indeed!"

You know whom I am talking about; you know what I am talking about. This truth is central to the Christian faith. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:4). The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, some two thousand years ago is celebrated today throughout the world and is the appropriate subject of my talk this Easter Sunday.

If there is one event that can truly be said to have changed the entire course of the history of this world, it has to be the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead. A few days earlier He had been condemned to death, tortured, then crucified like a common criminal. He had lived a short but remarkable life. He had taught many wonderful principles for living that are still widely admired today. But if He had just been buried and stayed dead Jesus would just be a faded memory of history. The reality is very different though. Time and again whilst teaching His followers, the Lord Jesus had predicted His death, but always added that He would rise again. The Lord Jesus said that He "had power to lay His life down, and power to take it again." Every single human life must be affected if the power and terror of death is broken as it was in the momentous events of Calvary.

I do not intend to argue the fact of the Lord's resurrection. It is recorded simply as a fact in the Word of God, the Bible. The transformed lives of the apostles bear testimony to it. One day they were scared individuals creeping away from a friend's desperate plight; the next they are fearless witnesses, challenging the very men who had led the cries to crucify the Lord. It is also confirmed in the selfless sacrifice of thousands of Christians through the years who have given up so much to spread the Gospel and defend their firm conviction that Jesus Christ died on their behalf but is now alive beyond the reach of death. Finally there is also the certainty we each have that Jesus Christ is alive today. In the words of the chorus, "You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart". So I believe in the literal, physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

I also believe it is absolutely central to Christianity. Without it we might as well give in to despair and anarchy. Why on earth should we have any moral standards at all, if this life is all there is. Paul said if that was the case "let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!" If Jesus Christ is still dead, not only is the Christian life a complete waste of time and effort, but any attempt to live a moral life, seeking the good of others, is also pointless.

The wonderful reality, however, is that Jesus Christ is alive today, and that brings tremendous joy, confidence and hope to the true believer but also sounds a note of warning to those who live as if He is dead.

I want to think of various things that rest upon the foundation of Christ's resurrection. It gives us:

- Proof of His sinlessness
- Proof of His victory
- Proof of my justification
- Proof of coming judgement
- Proof of the resurrection of all believers
- Proof that we shall be like Him.
- But it is also Proof that demands a verdict.

But before we look at these things we must try and catch a sense of the very personal impact of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus on the life of Mary Magdalene. Mary was a lady who had been totally controlled by Satan. She is described as being possessed by seven demons, but Jesus had freed her, and it is clear she had a deep love for the Lord Jesus and wanted to serve Him. She was one of the three women who stood at the foot of the cross, and she watched where His body was buried. Her desolation at seeing the cruel death of the One who had healed her we even

cannot begin to imagine. Early on the morning after the Sabbath, she returned to the grave while it was still dark but found the tomb empty. How on earth did she feel? They had killed her Lord, and now someone had stolen His Body! Mary hurries to tell two other friends of the Lord Jesus, Peter and John, who both go with her back to the grave. Peter and John look into the tomb which was carved out of the hillside, see the grave-clothes, and return to their homes. Heartbroken Mary, however, stays at the tomb weeping. You sense she now had nowhere to go to, and no one to turn to. Her sorrow consumed her.

What made Mary look again into the tomb? I don't know, but she sees two angels sitting there who ask her, rather impersonally, "Woman, why are you weeping?" They see her tears, but cannot understand the reasons for them. Mary tells them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him". She turns away from them and sees through her tears One she supposes to be the gardener. He asks her the same question but adds, "Whom are you looking for?" He knew the reason for the tears. Mary replies, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away". She mentions no name; her grief consumes her, and she supposes everyone else knows whom she is speaking about.

One word transforms her entire world – her name, "Mary", spoken by a voice she knew and loved. Mary responds, "Rabboni" or "My Master". The grave was empty because He was alive! The sorrow and grief that had overwhelmed her is dispelled in an instant, and she is filled with joy and happiness instead. But it is not just Mary's life that is transformed; we are all affected by what happened that morning. A Man had died a cruel death, had been buried but now three days later was alive again, never ever to die again. Some years later He speaks from heaven to His servant John, and says, "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore" (Revelation 1:18). He now holds the keys of Hades and Death.

It is to this same woman, Mary, who loved so much, and clearly demonstrated her devotion to the Lord Jesus, both at His cross and His grave, that the Lord Jesus entrusts the wonderful resurrection message: "Go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John 20:17). The Lord Jesus would soon return in glory to His God and Father, but wonderfully, His death and resurrection had secured for them a new and wonderful relationship with God as their Father. Nothing would ever be the same again!

### **Proof of His sinlessness**

But let's now go back to the consequences that rest upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ. One of the fundamental principles of the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ not only did not sin, but could not sin. Several times in Scripture He is spoken of as the "Holy One", for instance in Acts 3:14 or "that Holy One" in Luke 1:35. But in Psalm 16:10 it is prophetically spoken of the Lord, "You will not leave My soul in Hades; nor will You suffer Your Holy One to see corruption." This quotation is repeated by the Apostle Peter in Acts 2:27. If you or I die, it is a sad fact that our bodies will face corruption. The well known words that have been spoken at the graveside for centuries, "dust to dust, ashes to ashes", bear testimony to this fact. He however was different. He was entirely sinless, and it was not possible for Him to face corruption. He must rise again from the dead. You and I, through sin, are under the sentence of death; death had absolutely no such claim upon the Lord Jesus Christ. His resurrection is testimony to the absolute purity of His life.

### **Proof of His victory**

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is also clearly a proof of His victory over Satan and death. In the Old Testament story of David and Goliath, the two men go into the valley of Elah, but only one came out; David the victorious! There was an even more momentous struggle at Calvary. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says that it was "through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage". (Hebrews 2:15). There could only be one winner! A hymn I really enjoy puts it best:

*"His be the Victor's name  
Who fought the fight alone."*

It goes on to say:

*"By weakness and defeat,  
He won the meed and crown;  
Trod all our foes beneath His feet  
By being trodden down."*

*He Satan's power laid low;  
Made sin, He sin o'erthrew;  
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,  
And death by dying slew."*

From His place of victory, Jesus Christ can say in Revelation 1:18 the words I have already quoted, "I am He who lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of Hades and Death". It was by voluntarily going into death, meeting there Satan, who had through the centuries held people in dreadful bondage through fear of death, that Jesus Christ totally defeated our enemy and came out triumphant. He now holds the keys of Hades and Death. Jesus Christ is Lord of all! Paul writing to the Roman Christians said in Romans 14:9, "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and the living."

We must understand as well that His victory is our victory! We had no part at all in securing the victory, but we can and do share in the effects. David might have been the one who killed Goliath, but the whole nation of Israel could share in his joy and reap the benefits of his victory. Paul writing in the Epistle to the Ephesians prays that the Christians in that city, and ourselves as well, might know "what is the exceeding greatness of God's power towards us who believe" and he quickly goes on to link it with the "working of His mighty power, which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1:20-21). Was there ever a greater display of power? The Lord Jesus, who is called the Author of Life, was dead in the grave, but He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father and is now seated at God's right hand. Everything is under His feet, except His Bride, His beloved companion for eternity. Paul is concerned, is praying that you and I might really know that this same power is working towards us, and is available to us.

### **Proof of my justification**

The next matter that naturally flows from this is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is proof of my justification. In Romans 4:25 we read of "Jesus our Lord... who was delivered up for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Justification means a complete and righteous clearance from every charge that could possibly be laid against me; a new and righteous standing before a Holy God. Some have said that justification means "just as if I'd never sinned" but the reality is much greater. It is the acknowledgement that I have dreadfully offended a Holy God, but now I have been forever and completely cleared by the work of another.

I love the way Paul deals with this in Romans 8:34: "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather, who is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God." If God's righteous requirements had not been entirely satisfied by the death of Jesus Christ, He could not have raised Him from the dead. But God was satisfied, or rather, He was glorified by the sacrifice of His Son and was delighted to set Him at His own right hand in glory. The Lord Himself said on the cross, "It is finished", and the proof of that is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So Paul is saying in Romans 8, "Who can lay a charge against God's elect?" "Who can condemn?" Our acquaintances may remind us of our sins and shortcomings; Satan will certainly never miss an opportunity to do so. Our own hearts will condemn us, as we realise the way we so often fail, but the ever Holy God will not receive a charge against us because His Son died because of our offences, and was raised again for our justification!

### **Proof of coming judgement**

More solemnly the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is proof of coming judgement. The Apostle Paul speaking to the chattering classes of his day in Athens says that God "has appointed a day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained; and He has given assurance to all men, in that He has raised Him from the dead," (Acts 17:31) The Bible makes it very clear that it is a Man who will judge the world in righteousness. It is the same Man who was crucified at Calvary. All judgement is committed into His hands, as it is recorded in John 5:27. The day of judgement is already marked in God's calendar; the Judge has already been appointed. We have a solemn responsibility as Christians to warn others how they can escape the coming judgement.

### **Proof of the resurrection of all believers**

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is also the God given assurance of the reality of the coming resurrection of all believers. Paul, writing to the Corinthian Christians, said, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming," (1 Corinthians 15:22-23). Paul is drawing attention to the fact that it was the first man, Adam, who introduced sin and death into this world by his disobedience. But it is by the obedience of the Lord Jesus, who is also called the last Adam, that complete victory over death has been secured. Paul has such a strong conviction of this that he almost seems to taunt death when he goes on to say, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your sting? O

grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," (1 Corinthians 15:55-57 ).

The Jews believed in a general resurrection. While Martha was speaking to the Lord in John chapter 11 following the death of her brother, she said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day". But what is now clearly taught by the Lord Jesus is not just a general resurrection of the dead, but a resurrection from among the dead. Resurrection has this dual character. First, the resurrection of true believers, starting with Abel the first man to die, through to the last believer on the Lord Jesus. These all take part in what is called in Revelation 20:5 and 6 "the first resurrection". It goes on in the verse to speak about those who stay in the grave a further 1,000 years, that is during the period of the glorious reign on earth of the Lord Jesus. This first group are raised when the Lord Jesus returns for His people at the event called the rapture.

The second group who remain in the grave for a further 1,000 years are also raised from the dead. This group however do not face a wonderful future of unending happiness, but rather they are raised to face God's righteous judgement. In John 5:29, the Lord Jesus speaks of "those who have done evil" who will be raised to "the resurrection of condemnation". They will be judged according to what they have done and, because they have not accepted God's salvation in Jesus Christ they will spend eternity in hell, forever shut off from God's presence.

We read more about the "first resurrection" in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." It is a dramatic event, - the ultimate effects of the victory of the Lord Jesus at Calvary, seen as He raises millions of true believers to life again, some of whom have been dead for thousands of years, and together with Christians alive at the time, we are taken up to be forever with the Lord. Paul writing to the Thessalonian Christians says we should comfort, or encourage, each other with these words.

It is also taught in these scriptures that at that moment we shall all be changed. We have borne the image of the man of dust, a reference back to Genesis 2:7 where it says that "the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground". But "we shall also bear the image of the heavenly," (1 Corinthians 15:49). Elsewhere the apostle John writes, "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is," (1 John 3:2). And Paul again, writing this time to the Christians at Philippi, says "We eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able to subdue all things to Himself" Philippians 3:20-21

### **Proof that we shall be like Him**

The wonderful fact is that whilst today we are all limited, to a greater or lesser extent, by a body that is subject to sickness and death, soon we will have a glorious body, like the Lord Jesus. Then we will never again know any such limitation, never again be confused or discouraged, but will "know just as we ourselves are known."

Can I quote you another hymn?

"And is it so? We shall be like Thy Son!  
Is this the grace which He for us has won?  
Father of glory, thought beyond all thought,  
In glory, to His own blest likeness brought!

Nor we alone, Thy loved ones all, complete  
In glory round Thee there with joy shall meet,  
All like Thee, for Thy glory like Thee, Lord,  
Object supreme of all, by all adored."

### **Proof that demands a verdict**

The resurrection from among the dead of the Lord Jesus has implications for every one of us. If we are true Christians, it is the bedrock of our faith; it gives us confidence and assurance. We have a glorious hope ahead of us that is absolutely secure; it must colour the way we live our lives today. If you have never accepted Jesus Christ, it also has implications for you both now and in the future. Can you really afford to continue to live your life as if Jesus Christ is still dead? As we have seen in Acts, God raised Jesus Christ from the dead as a guarantee of the fact that one day He will judge this world. But it should be more than just the fear of coming punishment; if we seek meaning and purpose in our lives, victory over sinful habits, confidence regarding the future, all these are secured by trusting the Lord Jesus. Paul, writing in Romans 10:9, says that "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved".

Before I finish can I mention one other thing? Throughout all the Gospels, the name of Jesus is freely used: the narrative flows with His name. We read expressions like, "Jesus said", "Jesus answered", "Jesus was hungry" and even that "Jesus wept"! But when we get past the resurrection there is a clear change. We have already noticed that Mary spoke of Jesus as "my Lord". Peter in the Acts says that "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Later when talking to the Roman centurion, Cornelius, he makes the bold statement, "Jesus Christ, He is Lord of all". As we have seen, Paul in Romans 14:9, writes, "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living."

The right of the Lord Jesus to be called Lord was secured by His death and resurrection. When we omit to use the title we do not honour Him as we should. There is an increasing tendency just to speak to Him or of Him as Jesus. His truly is a wonderful name, but He won the right to be called Lord through tremendous suffering and in the victory of His resurrection. In a coming day we are taught "that every knee will bow to Him, and every tongue will confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11). It is our privilege and responsibility as Christians to honour Him in this way today.

As I finish, think again of that heart-broken group of men and women all those years ago. News of His resurrection spread quickly. At first, it seemed impossible, too wonderful to be true, but then a growing certainty dawned as more and more of their number bore witness to the truth. The couple in Luke 24 who had trudged back to the home at Emmaus, sad and disappointed, met with Him, and immediately turn round and hurry all the way back to Jerusalem. Peter, who had so publicly denied Him with oaths and curses, has a private meeting with his Master to sort things out. They are all convinced. Nothing would ever persuade them otherwise. Their conclusive, happy testimony is "The Lord is risen indeed!"

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